United Nations A/C.5/54/SR.24

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
10 February 2000

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 24th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 3 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. Wensley ..... (Australia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda Item 121: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 *(continued)* (A/54/6/Rev.1, A/54/7 and A/54/16)

1. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to begin its section-by-section consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (A/54/6/Rev.1). The sections would first be introduced by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ). Each section would then be considered by the Committee in first reading. The representatives of the Secretary-General, the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and the Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) would respond to questions and comments. The aim of the first reading was to identify particular difficulties, which would subsequently be taken up in informal consultations.

2. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that according to the Committee's programme of work the first six sections were to be taken up together. It might be better to take up fewer sections, since delegations needed time to prepare their comments in the light of the introductory remarks of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee; and they needed to go to the informal consultations properly prepared.

3. **The Chairman** said that she understood the concern of the delegation of Cuba and was mindful of the difficulties of smaller delegations and the need for group coordination. She had already discussed the problem with the Chairman of the Group of 77, and the Bureau and secretariat would see whether the programme could be adjusted.

4. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that he would like to make some general comments before dealing with individual sections of the proposed programme budget.

5. He recalled that at an earlier session more than 70 reports had been requested under the programme budget item. All delegations were of course entitled to request such reports, which sometimes served to facilitate broad agreement on the subject under discussion. The Advisory Committee had, however, deliberately decided to limit the number of separate reports produced in the context of the current and future budget proposals. In some cases it had suggested that information requested from the Secretariat but not available when the Advisory Committee was reviewing its final report should be submitted directly to the Fifth Committee. In other cases it had called for additional justification and clarification of the proposals submitted to the General Assembly. And in most cases it had requested that the information should be presented in the context of future budget proposals, for many of the requests did not warrant a separate report to the General Assembly at the current session.

6. Another means used by ACABQ to limit the number of its reports to the General Assembly was to group together its views and recommendations on a number of the reports submitted by the Secretary-General on, for example, conference services (A/54/7, paras. 108-125). After the Advisory Committee had completed that exercise the Secretariat had submitted a number of related reports covering, *inter alia*, conference services in Nairobi and support for regional and other groupings of Member States. Those related reports had not caused ACABQ to alter the views expressed in paragraphs 108-125 of its report.

7. He wished to draw particular attention to the recommendations and observations contained in paragraphs 119-121 of the report concerning honorariums payable to members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations.

8. It had been commented that the Fifth Committee sometimes did not accept ACABQ recommendations. ACABQ was an advisory body, and it was perfectly normal for the Fifth Committee to accept, revise or reject its recommendations without calling into question in any way the confidence placed by Member States in ACABQ, which had one of the highest rates of recommendation acceptance by the Fifth Committee.

9. The report of the Secretary-General ran to three volumes and 1,403 pages; the ACABQ report had 168 pages, or one page for each eight pages produced by the Secretary-General. He was confident that delegations would be able to follow the Advisory Committee's section-by-section presentation and would appreciate its observations and recommendations.

First reading

Section 1. Overall policy-making, direction and coordination

Section 2. General Assembly affairs and conference services

10. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the Advisory Committee's report on part I, comprising sections 1 and 2, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (A/54/7 (chap. II, part I)). The estimate for part I was $489.9 million.

11. Regarding section 1, in paragraphs I.5 to I.7 of its report the Advisory Committee commented on the support given to the Office of the President of the General Assembly and recommended that the adequacy of the present estimate should be carefully monitored with a view to adjusting it in the light of experience.

12. Paragraph I.9 contained a recommendation on travel for delegations of the least developed countries. In paragraph I.11 the Advisory Committee requested that a discount factor should be applied for the next proposed programme budget on the basis of past experience with regard to the estimates of $80,400 related to the reimbursement of air fares for spouses of members of the Advisory Committee.

13. In paragraphs I.13 and I.14 the Advisory Committee noted that the workload of the Board of Auditors had increased dramatically as a result of the demands made on the Board by the Advisory Committee itself, the Fifth Committee and peacekeeping operations. Paragraphs I.14, I.16 and I.17 contained comments on a number of requests for posts, and paragraphs I.18 to I.21 contained recommendations and observations on the proposals, including costs, which the Secretary-General was submitting to the General Assembly. In paragraph I.19 the Advisory Committee commented on other posts and requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals on various options for funding them on an ongoing basis.

14. Under section 2 the Advisory Committee had made a score of detailed observations and recommendations requiring action. In particular, in paragraph I.39 it requested further justification for the proposed reduction in conference services to be presented to the General Assembly at the current session. The Secretary-General had produced a note on temporary assistance for meetings (A/C.5/54/19), which was currently being reviewed by ACABQ.

15. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 1 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. In that connection she drew the Committee's attention to the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination contained in paragraph 94 of its report (A/54/16).

16. **Mr. Hamidullah** (Bangladesh) said that, as coordinator of the least developed countries, his delegation noted with appreciation the proposal to allocate $1,524,500 to cover the travel of representatives of Member States that were least developed. Such an arrangement would facilitate broad participation by Member States in the deliberations of the General Assembly. Bangladesh recognized the important role played by the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) with regard to the budget proposals and emphasized that CPC must have adequate resources to carry out its mandate. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that the Office of the President of the General Assembly should be provided with adequate resources and that the estimates for the Office should be presented separately.

17. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that his delegation noted from paragraph 23 of the foreword and introduction to the proposed programme budget that the appropriation and the changes were recosted to make provision for inflation. It could not understand why travel was recosted differently under different sections. For example, travel for CPC and the Committee on Contributions was recosted at 4.8 per cent but travel for ACABQ at 25 per cent, although all three committees met primarily in New York. His delegation would also welcome an explanation of why travel expenditures had increased by 88 per cent between 1996 and the 2000-2001 budget estimates. It also noted that, according to paragraph 2 (a) of General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII), travel and subsistence expenses should be paid in respect of members of organs and subsidiary organs who served in an individual personal capacity and not as representatives of Governments. It would like to know in that connection what the current criteria were for the payment of a daily subsistence allowance to ACABQ members, the amount of the allowance, and whether

any members resident in New York had ever been eligible to receive it.

18. **Ms. Aragon** (Philippines) said that her delegation supported the conclusions and recommendations of CPC on section 1 contained in paragraph 94 of its report (A/54/16) and on the foreword and introduction contained in paragraphs 79-87. It also supported the view that the Office of the President of the General Assembly should be provided with adequate resources, which should be presented separately, and that the amount of the resources should be adjusted in the light of experience. It accepted the proposals on the resources of ACABQ and CPC.

19. The Board of Auditors must also be provided with adequate resources to cope with its increasing workload; the proposed resources and staffing requirements for the Board were therefore acceptable.

20. Her delegation supported in principle the need to strengthen the offices of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, and the Strategic Planning Unit, but would welcome information about the studies which would be undertaken, at a proposed cost of $382,200, by the outside expertise referred to in paragraph 1.57 of the budget proposals. It shared the ACABQ view that inside expertise should first be sought.

21. The United Nations Office at Nairobi should certainly be strengthened, but her delegation would like to know whether the combination of the responsibilities of Director-General with those of Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had been approved by the appropriate legislative body.

22. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that his delegation noted from table 1.7 that travel costs connected with the General Assembly had increased by $292,000 in comparison with the 1998-1999 biennium; it would welcome an explanation. It also noted that ACABQ had evaluated and reviewed its own budget; that practice should be avoided in future. Furthermore, the amount of $80,400 for travel of spouses of ACABQ members would not represent an appropriate use of the contributions of Member States; the request should be deleted. Following up on the questions put by the representative of Canada, his delegation would welcome information about the travel and daily subsistence allowance costs of ACABQ members who also represented their countries in the Fifth Committee. It would also welcome further justification of the proposed new P-3 post for the Board of Auditors; it could not support what appeared to be a classic case of empire-building.

23. The proposals included $230,300 for hospitality provided by the Secretary-General in addition to his representation allowance of $25,000. Perhaps the Secretariat could say whether the two amounts were used for the same or different purposes. With regard to the estimate of $639,000 for the Executive Office of the Secretary-General for activities related to the Millennium Assembly and Millennium Summit, his delegation had understood that no additional resources would be required for those two events.

24. In conclusion he asked what the programme managers had done to implement the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, which required them regularly to evaluate their activities to determine their continued relevance, efficiency and effectiveness.

25. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that his delegation agreed that the Office of the President of the General Assembly should be given all the necessary resources for the discharge of its official functions; it would welcome details of the distribution of resources between the Presidents of the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions of the Assembly. The estimates for the Office should be presented separately from those for travel of representatives of least developed countries and it would like to know how the Secretariat intended to inform those countries of their entitlement to travel to the sessions of the General Assembly.

26. The proposed programme narratives placed much emphasis on human rights. Human rights were indeed important, but there were other important activities which should be given equal emphasis. His delegation supported the proposals on the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which should have the same status and financing as the other United Nations Offices. It also appeared from the narratives that there was some duplication of functions, for example between the Department of Public Information and the Secretary-General's Office of External Relations.

27. It was apparent that the outside expertise referred to in paragraph I.20 of the ACABQ report had not been recruited on a representative geographical basis. His delegation shared the Advisory Committee's lack of

conviction of the need for some of the services provided by consultants; the expertise available within the Organization should be used instead.

28. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation would like to know the reasons for the proposed 25 per cent discount of the travel costs of representatives of least developed countries; the recommendation made by the Advisory Committee in paragraph I.9 of its report that least developed countries should be duly informed of their travel entitlement by the Secretariat might have some connection with the discount. Paragraph 1.9 of the budget proposals referred to such travel in connection with special sessions in 2000 but did not mention other important meetings such as, for example, the tenth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Her delegation would like to know why such meetings had not been included under section 1 and in which sections they were to be found.

29. It would be useful if the Secretariat provided updated information on its ability or inability to guarantee the continuation of existing vehicle loans for the Secretary-General for the biennium 2000-2001 (A/54/6/Rev.1, para. 1.49). She would appreciate information on the activities of the Office of External Relations under the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (A/54/6/Rev.1, para. 1.50), in particular, on how it coordinated its work with that of the Department of Public Information. The Secretariat should comment on any possible duplication of functions, as referred to in the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (A/54/16, para. 91).

30. Referring to paragraphs 1.52 and 1.56 of the proposed programme budget and paragraph I.18 of the report of the Advisory Committee, she expressed concern that, in what appeared to be a departure from standard procedure, no statement of programme budget implications had been presented in connection with the requirements in support of the Millennium Assembly and Millennium Summit. She wondered whether the general temporary assistance posts outlined in paragraph 1.56 of the proposed programme budget would be filled by staff members with permanent contracts and whether they would be redeployed after the Millennium Assembly and Summit. She asked whether there was likely to be a revised estimate in that connection.

31. Her delegation shared the Advisory Committee's concern at the establishment of a new P-5 post to assist the Deputy Secretary-General in her responsibilities related to the ongoing reform process (A/54/7, para. I.16). The proposal was not justified since the General Assembly had determined that the Deputy Secretary-General must use the personnel resources of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. In conclusion, she wished to know how the outside expertise required by the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General (A/54/6/Rev.1 (vol. II, para. 1.57)) would be used and whether the individuals concerned would be recruited in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

32. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that his delegation endorsed the CPC conclusions and recommendations on section 1 of the proposed programme budget (A/54/16, para. 94). His delegation supported the Advisory Committee's request that resource requirements for the Office of the President of the General Assembly should be submitted separately; the Office should be provided with all necessary resources.

33. The General Assembly, in a number of resolutions, had stressed the need for the widest possible geographical representation in recruiting consultants, contractors and outside experts. And yet, according to paragraph I.20 of the report of the Advisory Committee, the two highest-ranking officials of the United Nations, namely, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, had recruited consultants from five countries, four of which were in the same geographical region. His delegation would appreciate information on the number of consultants provided by each of the countries mentioned and their total remuneration thus far during the current biennium.

34. **Mr. Takahara** (Japan) requested an explanation of the increase in resource requirements for travel and the measures taken to limit expenditures for that purpose. In that connection his delegation supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the Secretary-General should review every possible measure which would lead to further economies of travel (A/54/7, para. 96).

35. The establishment of a new P-3 post in the secretariat of the Board of Auditors, a new P-5 post to assist the Deputy Secretary-General in implementing the reform process and the reclassification of a speech-

writer's post from the P-2 to the P-3 level should take place in tandem with efforts to abolish or reclassify at a lower level other posts. The same practice should be followed in other sections of the budget.

36. With regard to the provision of general temporary assistance for activities related to the Millennium Assembly and the Millennium Summit, his delegation wondered whether the level of staffing was too high. It was his delegation's understanding that that provision was to be excluded from the programme budget for 2002-2003, as would be the case with other resource requirements related to those non-recurrent events.

37. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that he shared the concerns raised and looked forward to receiving the clarifications requested regarding section 1. He noted that there was a failure to distinguish clearly in section 1 between activities that should be funded from the regular budget and those for which voluntary contributions should be sought.

38. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Executive Secretary of the Advisory Committee would respond to the questions raised with respect to the resources allocated to ACABQ. He would seek the views of Advisory Committee members on whether ACABQ should consider its own budget and would report to the Fifth Committee on the outcome of those deliberations.

39. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that he would reply to a number of general questions immediately; answers to those that required detailed responses would be provided to the Committee in writing. In the context of his reform proposals the Secretary-General had included a provision for $250,000 in additional support for each President of the General Assembly. In future, the proposed programme budget would include a separate table breaking down that amount by object of expenditure. The resources proposed for the Millennium Assembly and Millennium Summit were non-recurrent. No programme budget implications had been submitted during the current biennium, since, in the early phase of the preparations, the Organization had had sufficient capacity to redeploy staff members for that purpose.

40. No legislative mandate was necessary to merge the functions of Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). That step had been taken at the request of the General Assembly with a view to strengthening the Nairobi Office and putting it on a par with the Vienna and Geneva Offices. The 25 per cent figure mentioned in connection with travel discounts for representatives of least developed countries was merely a budgetary technique that reflected past experience. In no way was it designed to restrict travel; in principle, all representatives of least developed countries were entitled to apply for reimbursement. He was not certain how often information on that entitlement was circulated; he would consult the relevant office and inform the Committee.

41. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said, in reply to the representative of Canada, that the increase in travel was designed to provide an adequate resource base for the biennium 2000-2001. It did not provide for additional travel or entitlements but merely maintained the existing level. He would submit detailed calculations to the Committee in informal consultations. Travel entitlements for representatives of the least developed countries were provided only for participation in regular, special or emergency sessions of the General Assembly, but not for other meetings, such as those of UNCTAD, referred to by the representative of Cuba.

42. **The Chairman** said that she took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 1 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration and appropriate action.

43. *It was so decided.*

44. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider section 2 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. In that connection she drew the Committee's attention to the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination contained in paragraph 105 of its report (A/54/16).

45. **Mr. Sareva** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that the establishment of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services two years earlier had been a welcome step towards streamlining conference services. However, the

integrated approach taken by the Secretariat was still incomplete. The European Union and the associated countries therefore supported the Advisory Committee's request for further review of the structure of section 2 (A/54/7, para. I.30). Such a review could be viewed as follow-up to the report of the Secretary-General on consolidation of technical secretariat servicing of intergovernmental bodies (A/53/452).

46. The European Union noted that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services expected to realize a net saving of 0.8 per cent over the next biennium through cost-saving measures — mainly reductions in temporary assistance — without any reduction in the quality of services provided. In that connection the European Union shared the Advisory Committee's views that the Secretariat should be more specific about its utilization of temporary assistance for meetings, and that proposed reductions should be evaluated in the light of the level and quality of conference services provided (A/54/7, para. I.39).

47. The European Union noted the expanded use of contractual translation and recognized that it could increase the need for revision at the senior level. It supported the Advisory Committee's request that, in the context of the next proposed programme budget the Secretariat should provide workload indicators and the results achieved (A/54/7, para. I.37). Remote and computer-assisted translation should enhance possibilities for Headquarters and other duty stations to share workload (see A/54/7, para. I.37). The European Union strongly supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that increased use should be made of videoconferencing (A/54/7, para. I.36). Lastly, it supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the printing service in Geneva should be reviewed urgently so as to promote cost effectiveness and avoid duplication (A/54/7, para. I.33). In that connection he expressed concern at the Secretariat's failure to provide the additional information requested by the Advisory Committee on printing costs in Geneva and a pilot project on remote interpretation for Nairobi (A/54/7, paras. I.33-I.34).

48. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) asked why the proposed programme budget indicated that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services would be servicing 30 meetings of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations, when, in fact, that body no longer met (A/54/6/Rev.1 (Vol. II, para. 2.36 (a) (ii) (b) (ix))). He also wondered why the request for $2.4 million for the purchase of computers and other office automation equipment under the Department's technological innovation programme did not include a training component (A/54/6/Rev.1 (Vol. II, para. 2.51)).

49. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that workload indicators should be further refined. It was clear from the differing methods of presenting information and workload indicators that the Department was not taking an integrated approach to the management of its New York, Geneva and Vienna operations. Based on the information given, his delegation had calculated that the New York translation services were 17.8 per cent more productive than those in Vienna and 10 per cent more productive than those in Geneva. It proposed aligning productivity standards at the three United Nations locations in order to realize savings and improve service. Similarly, publishing services in New York were 27 per cent more productive than in Geneva. Those discrepancies gave cause for grave concern. The information provided on interpretation services had been too confusing to allow for comparison of productivity in the three locations. His delegation would therefore appreciate statistics on actual performance in translation, interpretation and publishing, rather than on workload standards, which were merely theoretical.

50. **Mr. Jara** (Chile) expressed concern at the reduction of $3.5 million, or 0.8 per cent, in the level of resources proposed under section 2 for the biennium 2000-2001 compared to the revised appropriation for the current biennium (A/54/6/Rev.1 (Vol. II, para. 2.8)). That estimate did not reflect the actual needs of the Department, its planned increases in productivity or the need to improve the services provided. Underlying all the problems and challenges confronting the Department — the late issuance of documents, the high rate of self-revision, the quality of documents translated in the six official languages, access to documentation on the web site and the adequate provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other groups was a lack of resources. The hard work of the Secretariat staff and the introduction of new technology were not sufficient in themselves; adequate resources were necessary for the provision of satisfactory conference services. His delegation would comment further on that topic in the informals.

51. **Mr. Herrera** (Mexico) welcomed the introduction of new technologies, such as remote

interpretation, computer-assisted translation and videoconferencing, by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. His delegation was concerned about the late issuance of documents and the excessive reliance on self-revision, which was becoming financially counter-productive. In view of the importance of high-quality conference services to Member States in their work, his delegation would appreciate additional information before expressing its views on the proposed reduction of 0.8 per cent in the Department's appropriation. The advisability of such a reduction under the current circumstances should be carefully considered.

52. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) expressed concern at the 0.8 per cent net reduction in the overall level of resources proposed for the biennium 2000-2001, which risked adversely affecting the quality and timely delivery of services to Member States. There was a need to enhance the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional groupings of Member States. Conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi must be maintained at the same level and function in the same manner as those at other offices. His delegation remained convinced of the need to establish a permanent interpretation service in Nairobi. He noted that section 2 contained no information on expected accomplishments because the activities of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services were not easily quantifiable.

53. **Ms. Sun Minqin** (China) said that the level of the services provided by the Department directly affected the participation of Member States in United Nations meetings and conferences. She was pleased to note that the restructuring of the Department in 1997 had led to more efficient use of meetings services and facilities. She welcomed the Department's commitment to improving the quality of interpretation and translation, and she trusted that the measures envisaged would be fully implemented. She sought assurance from the Secretariat that the net reduction in the overall level of resources proposed for the biennium 2000-2001 would not adversely affect the activities of the Department, which had a significantly heavier workload than in the past.

54. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) expressed satisfaction that the proposed expenditures for General Assembly affairs and conference services reflected the outcome of efforts to carry out mandates more effectively and at the least possible cost. However, the estimated requirements of $439,600 for travel by members of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples were excessive and should be reduced to the level for the biennium 1996-1997. The Committee's regional seminars contributed nothing to the discourse on decolonization, and he questioned whether there was a need to send as many as three visiting missions to the Territories.

55. With respect to General Assembly affairs and conference services of New York, he noted that the estimated requirements for other staff costs had risen by $321,300 in order to accommodate increasing workloads, particularly in the Economic and Social Council Servicing Branch. His delegation would welcome additional information regarding the workload indicators used. The greatly increased requirements in respect of general operating expenses and furniture and equipment under the heading Planning, development and coordination of conference services, New York related to the replacement of office automation equipment. His delegation wished to know what productivity gains and savings could be expected as a result of the proposed expenditures.

56. He regretted the omission in section 2 of information regarding expected accomplishments, which was required under the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation. He did not agree with the view that the activities of the Department, which included servicing meetings and producing documentation and translations, did not lend themselves to quantification. He had seen no evidence to indicate that programme managers were conducing self-evaluation, but would welcome clarification in that regard.

57. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation supported the proposed expenditures for General Assembly affairs and conference services. He would, however, welcome clarification as to why the proposed budget for 2000-2001 introduced increases of nearly $43,000 for supplies and materials and some $665,000 for furniture and equipment over the 1998-1999 appropriations for translation and editorial services, New York, despite the fact that the volume of work had remained constant and requirements for posts had been reduced by $257,500.

58. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that her delegation was deeply concerned at the $3.5 million reduction in the level of resources proposed for the biennium 2000-2001 since all the evidence before the Committee indicated that no further budget reductions could be borne by Conference Services. Despite the best efforts of the Secretariat, the quality of services provided was declining. It was clear that the proposed programme budget did not take account of the concerns expressed by various intergovernmental bodies in that regard.

59. It was stated in paragraph 2.5 of the proposed programme budget that because of the uncertainty inherent in the timing and volume of the demand for meetings services, the Secretariat had to resort to temporary assistance in order to provide the services required. Yet, the estimated requirements for other staff costs represented a decrease of 9 per cent compared with the current biennium. The information provided in the note by the Secretary-General on temporary assistance for meetings: requirements for 2000-2001 (A/C.5/54/19) in response to a request by ACABQ did not contain sufficient justification for the proposed reductions. The Secretariat must provide a more detailed and transparent explanation.

60. Her delegation wished to know to what extent the application of new technologies in the documentation and publishing services would alleviate the problem of the late issuance of documentation and what other measures had been taken by the Secretariat to address the situation. It would also like to have updated information on self-revision rates, since the figures given in paragraph 1.46 of the report of ACABQ (A/54/7) dated from March 1999. They showed that self-revision rates were rising despite the concerns expressed by the General Assembly. The proposed reductions in temporary assistance for meetings were all the more perplexing in the light of those concerns, since the recruitment of experienced temporary staff would diminish the need for self-revision.

61. With respect to the proposal in paragraph 2.63 to redeploy a P-4 post from the Central Planning and Coordination Service in New York to the Copy Preparation and Proofreading Section to accommodate the post of Chief of the Spanish Group, she expressed surprise that no provision had been made for that post in the past. She was concerned at the impact on the Section of the abolition of a P-2 post proposed in the same paragraph. It was stated in the introduction to the proposed programme budget that the redeployment of posts between programmes and subprogrammes was intended to apply human resources to priority needs. She would like the Secretariat to identify the priority needs with respect to each section of the proposed programme budget.

62. Her delegation was concerned that the requirements for the Special Committee represented only a small increase. It wished to know why there was no mention in the list of United Nations meetings and conferences in paragraph 2.7 of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Set of Multilaterally Agreed Equitable Principles and Rules for the Control of Restrictive Business Practices, and what use had been made of the $1.2 million previously appropriated by the General Assembly for improvements to conference rooms.

63. **Mr. Takahara** (Japan), referring to the technological innovation programme mentioned in paragraph 2.54, requested additional information on both the programmatic aspects and the resource requirements for the programme, as well as on the timetable for upgrading, the expenditures on the programme in previous bienniums and the estimated expenditures in future bienniums. He also wished to know whether the programme would contribute to the reduction of resource requirements and, in particular, post requirements in the General Service category.

64. With respect to conference and library services, Vienna, he said that the estimated requirements should take into account the anticipated workload and that due regard should be given to the quality of services. His delegation was concerned that, given the likely increase in the workload, the needs of Member States would not be met.

65. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that it was important that the Department should be adequately funded. He shared the concerns expressed by previous speakers at the net reduction in the overall level of resources proposed, and, in particular, at the reductions in temporary assistance for meetings. There was a tendency in section 2 to confuse activities that were to be funded from the regular budget and those for which extrabudgetary resources would be used. Meetings were being increasingly conducted without interpretation services, which created problems for delegations, in particular, those from African States. It was therefore to be hoped that that situation would be

addressed. While he welcomed the application of modern technology, including the use of remote interpretation and translation, certain basic requirements must still be met in order to ensure that the conference services at all United Nations offices and centres were utilized as effectively as possible. In that connection, he wished to align himself with the statement by the representative of Algeria regarding the need to establish a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. It was unclear to him why the requirements for library services in Geneva and Vienna were set out in section 2, while those for library services in New York were dealt with in section 26 (Public information). He would also welcome additional information on the Department's system of cost accounting and on the comparative costs for in-house and external printing.

66. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) said that his delegation endorsed the recommendations made in paragraph 105 of the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the work of its thirty-ninth session (A/54/16). He expressed concern at the net reduction in the overall level of resources under section 2. The Secretariat should provide further justification for the proposed reductions in temporary assistance, as requested in paragraph 1.39 of the report of ACABQ. He asked what safeguards were in place to ensure that the proposed increase in the use of contractual translation did not adversely affect the quality of the services provided.

67. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division), responding to questions, said that the overall level of resources proposed under section 2 for the biennium 2000-2001 ($423,593,800) reflected a net reduction of only $3.5 million, or 0.8 per cent, compared to the revised appropriation for the biennium 1998-1999. While every effort was made to align resource allocations with the demand for meetings services, it was not possible at the time of preparation of the budget proposals to foresee each of the thousands of meetings that needed to be serviced in each biennium.

68. The question was whether it was possible with reduced resources to still provide an appropriate quality of service in the biennium 2000-2001. That goal could be achieved through the various cost-saving measures currently in place, including improved control of resources budgeted for temporary assistance for meetings, increased capacity utilization and the application of new technologies. The note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/C.5/54/19 provided further justification for the reductions in temporary assistance for meetings in the biennium 2000-2001. In addition, the note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/C.5/54/18 addressed the issue of internal and external printing practices at the Organization.

69. On the subject of productivity rates for translators in New York, Geneva and Vienna, while he had not seen the figures, those rates would reflect the different workload patterns at the duty stations in question. Unlike in Geneva and Vienna, for example, translators in New York frequently worked night shifts. Moreover, meetings in New York were programmed on a continuous basis, while there were large gaps between meetings at the other duty stations.

70. As for the absence of a permanent interpretation capacity at Nairobi, the Secretariat had concluded that the workload at that duty station did not justify the retention of an in-house team of interpreters. Service was provided, however, for all meetings that were entitled to interpretation. Interpreters represented a scarce resource, which was wasted if no meetings were held.

71. Concern had been expressed at the level of resources proposed for the attendance at meetings and seminars of members of the Committee of 24. The level proposed was the same as for the biennium 1998-1999. The biennium 1996-1997 had been an exceptional one in which a number of activities had been subject to reductions as a result of action by the General Assembly to achieve budgetary savings. The pattern of expenditure for that biennium could not therefore be used as a basis for comparison. It should also be recalled that proposals for missions and seminars to be undertaken by the Committee of 24 were reviewed by another committee of the General Assembly.

72. With regard to the proposed allocations for furniture and equipment for the Interpretation Services, the acquisition of laptop computers would help managers to programme resources more efficiently and thus to avoid waste.

73. Concerning the absence from the programme budget proposals of indicators for self-evaluation, it should be pointed out that self-evaluation for programme managers was a standing requirement and no department was exempted from that arrangement.

74. As to why statements of expected accomplishments were absent from section 2, in its first attempt to use the new arrangements the Secretariat had confined itself to providing the statements for substantive programmes. He hoped that they could be included in all sections of future programme budget proposals.

75. With regard to expenditure for the improvement of conference rooms, the Assembly had allocated $1 million from the savings achieved during the 1996-1997 biennium for the upgrading of booths, audiovisual equipment and seating for interpreters. A preliminary report had been issued at the end of 1998, and additional work done in the summer of 1999. It was his understanding that the bulk of the resources had already been disbursed or obligated. Additional details would be provided on the subject in informal consultations.

76. Lastly, the Committee on Conferences was currently working on the details of the cost accounting system for conference services. He would attempt to fill any gaps that might exist in the information he had just provided in informal consultations.

77. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation was concerned by the reduction in resources for conference services, on which all delegations were heavily dependent. Resources for conference services should, rather, be increased in each biennium.

78. He was surprised by the Secretariat's failure to propose any increase in the budget for activities under section 2 relating to decolonization, when increases had been proposed for other, less important activities.

79. He reiterated his belief that remote translation and interpretation should be used in exceptional circumstances only, such as world conferences, and should not become standard practice. He was not opposed to the use of technological innovation, provided that care was exercised and standards maintained, but he was concerned that an increase in remote translation would lead to a reduction in language posts and affect the equality of languages.

80. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that the note by the Secretary-General on temporary assistance for meetings in 2000-2001 (A/C.5/54/19) did not provide any substantive information on the issues which she had raised. Her delegation requested more detailed information on and specific justification for the overall reduction in the proposed programme budget for conference services. It also wished to know why the United Nations Conference on Restrictive Business Practices had been omitted from the list of conferences and meetings mentioned in paragraph 2.7 of the proposed programme budget and why there were no specific proposals for the reclassification of posts with a view to improving the career prospects of staff in the language services. Lastly, she would welcome additional details of the elimination of a Spanish-language post and an explanation of why the servicing of the Fifth and Sixth Committees of the General Assembly and of the Security Council was not being undertaken by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. It would also be useful to have an updated report on the experience thus far with the new meetings-servicing arrangements.

81. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) sought clarification of the remarks which the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division had made on the subject of interpreters at Nairobi.

82. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the Committee on Conferences had considered the possibility of establishing an in-house interpretation capacity at Nairobi, but had concluded that the low utilization rate of the conference rooms at that duty station did not justify such a decision.

83. **Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo** (Uganda) said that the decision as to whether a permanent interpretation capacity should be established at Nairobi was a political one and he would pursue the matter further in informal consultations. He did not agree that interpreters would be underutilized at Nairobi, since they would be available to serve at other duty stations when not required at Nairobi.

84. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that it would be useful if the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division could provide at least preliminary answers to the questions which her delegation had asked.

85. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that, while he did not have the relevant documentation before him, he recalled that, in its resolution 52/220, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to keep conference-servicing arrangements under review and to submit to the Assembly a report in that regard, with a view to considering the possible integration of all conference-servicing resources for all Main Committees of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary and ad hoc bodies and special conferences into the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. In the requested report, the Secretary-General had stated that, because of the specific nature of the work done by the Fifth and Sixth Committees and by the Security Council, the servicing of those bodies should be undertaken by organs in the relevant substantive areas. He was not aware that the General Assembly had required an annual report to be submitted on the subject.

86. With regard to the concerns expressed at the level of established posts, the same level of staffing support as in the current biennium was considered appropriate for the biennium 2000-2001, when it was proposed to have the same level of meetings.

87. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), said, with reference to the career prospects of staff in the language services, that in the early 1980s there had been a restructuring of posts in the language services to provide more posts at senior grades so as to improve career prospects. The proposals made by the Secretary-General at that time had been considered by the Advisory Committee, which had recommended that the General Assembly should approve the proposals. In its resolution 35/225 of 17 December 1980, the General Assembly had approved the new grade structure for implementation in the period 1981 to 1983.

88. The Advisory Committee believed that the drafters of the Secretary-General's report (A/53/919) might not have been aware of the existence of the previous reports and related action taken by the General Assembly, since no mention had been made of them. Accordingly, the Advisory Committee requested that a comprehensive review of the grading of language posts at all duty stations should be conducted and the results presented to ACABQ for consideration prior to the preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003. Since the grade structure in the language services had already been changed to improve career prospects it was incumbent on the Secretary-General to justify any further changes. In particular, it must be demonstrated that career prospects in the language services of the United Nations were less favourable than in other United Nations services.

89. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) agreed with the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division that the General Assembly had not requested an annual report to be submitted on the subject of meetings-servicing arrangements. Her delegation was merely seeking updated information on how the new arrangements had worked in practice.

90. **The Chairman** said that she took it that the Committee had completed its first reading of section 2 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 and wished to refer that section to informal consultations for further consideration.

91. The Committee also took note of the fact that the Secretariat would provide additional information in writing in informal consultations. For its part, the Bureau had taken note of the request by the Cuban delegation for consideration of section 2 of the proposed programme budget to be resumed at another formal meeting.

Other matters

92. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that in view of the fact that it had been on the basis of the Fifth Committee's report on the pattern of conferences (A/53/744) that General Assembly resolution 53/208 had been adopted, it would be more appropriate if discussion of the development of Web sites in the six official languages took place in the Fifth Committee rather than the Fourth Committee. He therefore requested the Chairman to submit such a proposal in writing to the Chairman of the Fourth Committee.

93. His delegation had noted the reduction in the amounts apportioned for daily subsistence allowance for the disarmament fellowship programme.

94. He stressed the need for the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to continue to be financed from the regular budget and to be provided with sufficient resources for it to carry out its mandate, pursuant to Security Council resolution 50 (1948).

95. **The Chairman** said that she would discuss with the Bureau the matters which the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic had just raised.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.